

in unexplained hydrops to detect the rare fetus with anaemia secondary to parvovirus infection or fetomaternal haemorrhage.

Access to blood samples from fetuses led to a wealth of research and important contributions to the understanding of human fetal physiology, metabolism, and disease. Banks of surplus samples from clinically indicated procedures should be maintained as a valuable resource for future research, as ethics committees are unlikely to approve fetal blood sampling solely for research.

Blood sampling carries a risk of fetal loss of 1–3%,^{7 14 15} with up to 25% in high risk pregnancies.¹³ The development of non-invasive or less invasive procedures that provide the same

information should be encouraged. The contracting role for fetal blood sampling has implications for training as the experience of the operator is the main determinant of the risk associated with the procedure. The real skill in the future, however, may not be manual but may rather lie in knowing in whom not to perform this procedure.

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Why do adults sexually abuse children?

Men and society are mostly to blame, but apportioning guilt is difficult

Of the 3800 children newly registered on child protection registers as having been sexually abused in England and Wales in the year to 31 March 1992,¹ probably about a third will have been abused by young people—mostly boys—and two thirds will have been abused by adults—95% by men and 5% by women. Most will have been abused within the family or by a trusted adult.² Despite the considerably increased public awareness of the deleterious effect of sexual activity with children the annual number of registrations currently is similar to that of previous years.

Why do adults continue to abuse children? Does it represent a pathological perversion of sexual interest and orientation or an incestuous family affair? Or does it represent a more general view of women and children as appropriate victims of male sexual interest and therefore appropriate objects to meet sexual needs? Although abuse by women is now being recognised, the fact that most known sexual abusers are men seems to indicate that how boys and men are socialised is somehow connected with why they sexually abuse children.

Recent studies on young male university students have shown how commonly they found children sexually arousing and the role of social inhibitions in preventing them acting on their arousal.³ Studies of those who abuse children suggest that a substantial number had a sexualised orientation towards children in their teenage years, even as early as 12.⁴

What accounts for this early orientation and interest in children as objects of sexual desire? An important focus of interest has been whether adults who sexually abuse children were abused in their own childhood, so that their later sexual orientation was influenced.⁵ Yet girls are abused four or five

times more commonly than boys, and women make up only a small proportion of adults who abuse children.

How boys and girls are socialised may play some part in how they respond to a similar abusive experience.⁶ Girls tend to internalise their response to abusive experiences. They believe that abuse is their fault, which is reinforced by adults who claim to misperceive their ordinary affection and early sexual interests as equivalent to adult signals. Commonly, negative self attributes develop, together with self mutilation, anorexia nervosa, and the adoption of victim roles. Boys, however, tend to externalise their experiences of abuse. Flashbacks related to traumatic experience and memories of abusive acts shape boys' sexual activities. Memories of their own abuse intermingle with developing sexuality, reinforced by the common stereotypes of "macho" male roles in the media. The combination of a reaction to powerlessness and sexualisation associated with the abuse lead to the active need to find someone to take over their own traumatised self representation, someone else who reminds them of their powerlessness and can be made to feel it instead. Revenge may be part of it, and some girls also follow this route.⁷ Unsurprisingly, men and women who have had similar experiences may find each other, and adults who abuse their own children have high rates of both sexual and physical abuse in their own childhoods and focus on their own needs, so that they are emotionally unavailable to their children.⁸

Not all adults who are sexually interested in children were sexually abused as children. For example, boys commonly compensate for rejection and non-sexual physical abuse by finding emotional closeness through sexuality. This may account for their later sexual interest in children. It is argued

that the body shape and size of children, being smaller, smoother, and less powerful,⁹ triggers memories of their own childhood experiences and is in line with stereotypes of what is sexually attractive to men and some women.

Among men who have poor self esteem and considerable anxieties about their identity and capacities, sexual activities with children may seem easier, with less resistance to overcome, and less chance of rejection and a repetition of earlier humiliation. The child comes to be seen as an object rather than a person, and once sexual activities are initiated they become self reinforcing, addictive, and a continuing reason to repeat abusive activities. A process of arousal, masturbatory activity, the use of pornographic material, the overcoming of guilt, and the targeting and grooming of the child often occurs, followed by repetition and recreation of this cycle.¹⁰ Involvement in an extensive ring, whether inside or outside the family, strengthens the belief that sexual interest in children is a legitimate and appropriate direction for sexual activities.¹¹

The distinction made between fixated paedophiles (who have emerged from childhood and adolescence with children as their main sexual object) and regressed paedophiles (who have normal relationships until some stressful event pushes them towards children)¹² may be more apparent than real. Although men who abuse children later on put forward the view that their sexual interest has been triggered by failed relationships, the blocking of sexual outlets, or their child reaching the age and resembling their partner when they met, these may be more rationalisations than reasons. Although these adults may seem to be exclusively interested in a child within their own family circle, they may in fact find children in general sexually arousing.⁴ Some may abuse both inside and outside their families, and exploration of their earlier histories may indicate a similar pattern of experiences to those of people who emerge from adolescence with a sexual interest in

children. Protective factors may mean that their sexual interest in children emerges only later.

Often sexual interest in children may be extremely strongly denied and alcohol, drugs, or illness may lead to the breaching of previously maintained barriers.¹³ The death or illness of a partner or unexpected proximity to a child (for example, through unemployment) may also weaken inhibitions. Factors such as learning or physical disabilities may increase a particular child's vulnerability to abuse.¹⁴ As the recent furore about child-like models in *Vogue* has shown there is no shortage within the media of attractive children to reinforce what are very much denied, but at the same time widely held, views of children as appropriate sexual objects.

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Improving the sexual health of the nation

Time to break the impregnable silence on men and sex

Men are under pressure to be sexually active. Interest in sex is generally high, the threshold of male sexual arousal low, and the expectation that men are having sex universal. Sexual intercourse is, after all, an essential requirement to prove one's masculinity. Surprise and disbelief greet disclosures of sexual inexperience or inactivity. In male conversation sex is a topic for jokes. Disclosure of the ignorance, anxieties, problems, and negative emotions that may be present in a man's personal struggle with his sexuality is strictly taboo.¹

Sexual activity should be about pleasure and intimacy. Pleasure is the more important factor for men, and dissatisfaction with their sex lives is undoubtedly common. Ignorant that other men are not faring better and driven by the notion that their sex life is missing something, men privately but avidly seek more information and new experiences, both real and in fantasy. The plethora of sex manuals, sex aids, "teaching" videos, and frank pornographic material is sustained by men's search and hope for more excitement and satisfaction. The search for visual and physical stimuli to enhance sex is predominantly a male trait.

Silence in the face of problems, anxieties, and weaknesses is one feature of masculinity. It often seems that masculinity

itself, together with the unrealistic role models paraded by the media, conspires to make sexual fulfilment a struggle for many men and mitigates against the successful resolution of problems when they arise. The extent to which the traits of masculinity are derived biologically or by nurture remains an issue of debate,² but many are not amenable to radical change.

The performance oriented approach of men, focusing on activities rather than people, is inappropriate when applied to sexual intimacy. Intimacy other than penetration is termed foreplay, implying that the goal of the encounter is penetration. The potential for dissatisfaction with a performance is colossal. Penetration may not be achieved, ejaculation may occur too early or without intense pleasure, and the man's partner may not experience the delights of multiple orgasms. Men's notion of touching and physical contact is often limited to sport and sex. Intimacy without intercourse may engender feelings of failure and discontent.

Characteristics evident in men include aggression, dominance, status seeking, physical strength, competitiveness, and also difficulties in articulating feelings and emotions and a reluctance to disclose weaknesses and personal vulnerabilities.